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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

The German forcing of Laval on France has made clear the unreality of Marshal Pétain's attempt to withdraw France from the war in order to rebuild her life in isolation from the conflicts raging around her. What Laval may do to safeguard Germany's war effort no one can tell, but there is no question that the overwhelming majority of French people desire the victory of the United Nations.

FRANCE

Through all the vicissitudes in the relations between this country and France we must be chary of passing judgment and determine to understand. One frequently hears remarks to the effect that France "must have been rotten to the core." Her military collapse is attributed to the corruptness of her politics. There is some ground for these assertions, but taken as a complete explanation they are misleading and even mischievous. They leave out of account another range of facts. The whole fabric of the French nation was impaired by the last war. While both Great Britain and Germany lost millions of men, neither lost so high a proportion of its total population as France. Thus with her resources of man-power drastically impaired, France had to address herself to the task of making good the ravages of four years of war waged upon her own soil. The effect of these ravages was felt in other directions also. We probably do not allow enough for the influence of outward things in the formation of national sentiment. A visitor from this country to Northern France, who knew it intimately and was a welcome guest in scores of French homes, remarked on one occasion: "At first I could not discover what it was that struck me as odd about these homes, and then I suddenly realized that there was nothing old in any of them—no old furniture, china or glass, no family heirlooms and relics. It was all new, all rootless and brittle." These and similar facts must be borne in mind in judging present conditions.

Information about the trends of opinion in France is scanty. It seems clear that, notwithstanding Marshal Pétain's attempt to restore the national life, the uncertainties of the future preclude the kind of interest in post-war reconstruction that exists in this country. But the letters that come through occasionally contain indications that in the Protestant community, and in particular among its younger members, there is a growing awareness of the immediate task. It is recognized that the abandonment by Christians of politics as a "dirty game" in the years between the wars was a mistake, and that Christians have no right to cut themselves off from the nation and wash their hands of responsibility. It is felt that in a nation which as a whole has said "Yes" to the easier path, it is the duty of small groups of Christians to be ready, where necessary, to say "No." There is a growing realization that to be a Christian may be a costly thing, and a growing conviction that there are a few things that must be held to against the drag of the tide. Only if these are preserved can there be any resurrection of France.

I have seen a recent letter from unoccupied France. One cannot tell how general are the tendencies described. But I know that the writer has wide contacts, particularly

with older boys and girls, and that this letter reflects to some extent what is passing in their minds. I have tried to distil from a long letter what is central in the attitude of the writer. The gist of it is given in the following passages from the letter :—

"We discovered at a stroke that the Gospel is nothing unless it is incarnated in the life of a man, if it is not an inexhaustible source of manliness, if it does not form characters of steel. We began to grasp again a truth which the joy of the theological revival of recent years had somewhat obscured—that the redemption of Jesus Christ is not the annihilation but the fulfilment of manhood, and that one cannot be a Christian without being in the fullest sense a man, with all the commitments to participation, action and struggle which that implies."

(The writer mentions the case of a Protestant pastor, well-known outside his own country, who when he was demobilized, seemed stunned by the horrors of the retreat and kept repeating to himself : "The *first* Christian virtue is courage.")

"The question of the whole man, the question of our humanity, of humanism, is now placed before us, and we cannot decline to face it, we cannot pass it by, without refusing the call of God.

"That God reigns, that Jesus Christ is the King of kings, that the Holy Spirit gives us the assurance of our freedom from the power of demons, and of our entire encirclement by the love of God—that is the certitude that can be given to us, if we do not despise the grace that is offered. What certainty can be more triumphant ? But we learn at the same time that we can be confessing members of a confessing Church only if we take seriously our life as men, our duties to the state and the environment in which God has placed us."

OUR MEMBERSHIP OVERSEAS

We did not expect when the News-Letter was started that it would find many readers outside Great Britain. In actual fact we have at the present time more than 1,500 members overseas. They are distributed widely throughout the world. Our circulation in European countries, which at the beginning was considerable, has been for the most part cut off by the German occupation of the Continent ; but copies still go to Switzerland, unoccupied France, Iceland, Gibraltar and Malta. More recently our membership has also been cut off in occupied China, Burma, Malaya, Java and New Guinea. We have more than 250 members in the continent of Africa in over twenty different territories. In Asia we have more than 200 members. Most of these are in India, but there are also some in Free China and a few in Syria, Palestine, Iran and Iraq. There are 130 members in Australia and New Zealand—almost half of these in the latter. We have close on 600 members in the United States in forty different states, and over 200 in Canada in ten different provinces. In the West Indies we have members in Jamaica, Grenada, Barbados and Trinidad, and in South America, readers in British Guiana, Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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